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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001109

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD. PLEASE ALSO PASS TOPEC.

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TAGS: PREL CE LTTE

SUBJECT: LACK OF TRUST STYMIES PROGRESS ON PEACE SOLHEIM TELLS DONORS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. Reason 1.5 (b,d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Eric Solheim says the main issue now is trust and confidence. The Tigers are focusing on attacks on them in the East committed by pro-Karuna forces which they believe are being aided by Sri Lankan military intelligence. The GSL said it would make sure there are no more such operations. The Tigers are also upset about anti-Tiger broadcasts on state radio. If the situation calms down, Solheim believes other issues can be resolved and negotiations begun, as both sides want to get back to the table. The Tigers deny they have resumed under-age recruitment. Norway will continue to talk to both sides and hope the situation in the East calms down. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Norwegian Special Envoy Eric Solheim briefed donor reps July 1 on his meetings in Sri Lanka. He had met GSL figures, including President Kumaratunga, Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, and LTTE political chief Tamilchelvan.

The Karuna Affair

¶13. (C) Solheim said the LTTE was focused on the situation in the East and Karuna. They believe Karuna groups are operating against them in the East with the assistance of Military Intelligence. They said no progress could be made until this situation ended, and that it was a violation of the Cease Fire Agreement. In response, GSL leaders said they will make sure there are no more such operations. They noted that a new Chief of Army Staff took office on July 1, and that he would make certain this was the case. In response to a question as to whether the GSL had admitted supporting Karuna, Solheim noted that details of past donor briefing had been leaked almost verbatim to the press, and that he therefore did not want to answer that sensitive question. (Comment: We will get that information in a more confidential setting.)

Anti-Tiger Broadcasts

¶14. (C) The Tigers also complained that the government-controlled Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) was transmitting everyday an hour-long production from a London-based "Tamil Broadcasting Corporation" (TBC). This was described as a pro-Karuna group which was advocating violence against the LTTE and demerger of the Northern and Eastern provinces. When Solheim raised the issue, the GSL said it would look into it.

Lack of Trust Stymies Progress

¶15. (C) Solheim said there had been no major developments on the issue of the agenda for the talks, with both sides sticking to their previous positions. The problem, he said was a lack of confidence, as exemplified by the Karuna and TBC issues. With confidence and trust, he was sure the agenda issue could be solved quickly.

Development Issues

¶16. (C) Solheim said the government was eager to increase assistance to the North and East. The LTTE is ready to continue the current situation, in which some assistance is channeled to the area through the Provincial Council. They are not ready for any major initiatives (such as a NERF-like structure) until the ISGA is in place and running. He noted that the LTTE is ready--when the situation in the East calms down, to begin talks on the subject of an interim administration. They are not insisting that the talks be only on their own ISGA proposal.

Ready to Move?

¶17. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question, Solheim said

that he believed there was a strong will on both sides to return to the table. If the confidence issues can be resolved, he believes that will solve the agenda issue. He said he believed that the LTTE had no intention to go back to war, and that their threatening press statements were for public consumption. He agreed that so far the Government had shown flexibility on the agenda issue, while the LTTE had not.

Recruitment? What Recruitment?

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18. (C) The Norwegians discussed child recruitment and re-recruitment at length with the LTTE, which said that UNICEF's figures were wrong. The Norwegians delivered a strong message that (1) this was an important human rights issue and (2) the LTTE actions were damaging to their image around the world.

Norwegians Will Press On

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19. Solheim said that Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Helgeson might return to Sri Lanka around the end of July, and Solheim himself might get to London to speak to Balasingham. In the meantime, Ambassador Brattskeir would continue his efforts with both sides, and there would be other contacts.

COMMENT

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10. (C) Solheim was realistic but not discouraged. The immediate issue is whether the targeted acts against the LTTE in the East will cease. Solheim noted that the Tigers were more concerned with the ground situation in the East than they were with Karuna as an individual. On that issue, during a meeting June 30, Defense Secretary Herath implicitly admitted to Ambassador that the military was holding Karuna, and agreed that the best thing might be for Karuna to simply come out into the open and join the political process. On July 1, anti-LTTE Tamil political leader Douglas Devananda told Ambassador that he expected that would happen soon, perhaps next week.

LUNSTEAD